

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 1506

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BEXP, ECON, SY

SUBJECT: OPENING THE DAMASCUS FAIR

1. THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE DAMASCUS FAIR TOOK PLACE ON EVENING JULY 25. THERE WAS FORMAL OPENING CEREMONY AT THE FAIR THEATER WITH MAJOR SPEECH BY MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FOREIGN TRADE, DR. MOHAMAD ISMADI. THE MAIN THRUST OF HIS SPEECH WAS THAT DESPITE WAR ECONOMY, SYRIA HAS MADE CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN THE ECONOMIC, COMMERICAL AND AGRICULTURAL FIELDS. WE WERE PARTICULARLY STRUCK BY NUMEROUS REFERENCES SARG ACTIONS WHICH HAVE LIBERALIZED SYRIA'S ECONOMIC SYSTEM. AS IF TO BALANCE REFERENCES TO LIBERALIZATION, HOWEVER, SPEECH ALSO SINGLED OUT FOR PRAISE THE SOVIET UNION, PARTICULARLY, AND THE OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES BY NAME FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. OTHER AID DONORS WERE LUMPED TOGETHER IN TERM "FRIENDLY COUNTRIES." FOLLOWING SPEECH THERE WAS RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY AT SYRIAN PAVILION AND BUFFET DINNER.

2. THE FAIR GROUND ITSELF WAS NOT OPENED OFFICIALLY TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, ALTHOUGH THE CROWDS IT WOULD HAVE
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BEEN DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE. U.S. PAVILION WAS NOT OPEN

THAT EVENING DUE TO LATE ARRIVAL OF FEW EXHIBITS. THIS ENTIRELY RESULT OF AIRLINE FLIGHT CANCELLATIONS DUE TO CYPRUS SITUATION. WE DID SHOW USIS FILMS IN OUTDOOR THEATER WHICH DREW CROWD SEVERAL THOUSAND LARGE.

3. ON JULY 26 PAVILION OPENED TO GENERAL PUBLIC BOTH IN MORNING AND EVENING. THE U.S. PAVILION WAS WITHOUT ANY DOUBT AN IMMEDIATE CENTER OF ATTRACTION AT THE FAIR. AT ONE POINT IN EVENING APPROXIMATELY 3,500 PERSONS PER HOUR WERE PASSING THROUGH THE PAVILION. WE SAW NO OTHER PAVILION WITH SUCH ENORMOUS CROWDS. IT IS FACT WAS THIS SUCCESS WHICH BECAME THE PAVILION'S NEMESIS--AT LEAST FOR LAST NIGHT. THE CROWDS WERE POURING THROUGH AT SUCH RATES THAT QUITE TRUTHFULLY THE VERY WALLS OF BUILDING WERE SHAKING. EVEN WITH ASSISTANCE OF 15 POLICEMEN WE WERE UNABLE TO HANDLE CROWDS AND WE WERE FORCED TO CLOSE PAVILION A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE HOUR BEFORE FAIR ITSELF WAS SCHEDULED TO CLOSE. DESPITE THIS RATHER NEGATIVE COMPLIMENTARY BEGINNING, OUR FILM SHOW WAS AGAIN TREMENDOUS SUCCESS WITH AN ESTIMATED AUDIENCE OF 3,000 PLUS FOR THE TWO HOUR SHOW. (FYI: MEANWHILE, WE WORKED THROUGH THE NIGHT BUILDING CROWD CONTROL RAILINGS AND GATES AND BELIEVE WE WILL NOT HAVE SAME DIFFICULTY TONIGHT, INSHALLAH*)

4. THERE NO DOUBT OUR MINDS THAT PROBLEM WAS RESULT OF TREMENDOUS INTEREST AND PENT-UP CURIOSITY ON PART OF FAIR GOERS WHO DESIROUS SEE FIRST U.S. PARTICIPATION IN MANY YEARS. IN FACT THERE WAS OBVIOUS STREAM OF FAIR GOERS DIRECTLY FROM MAIN FAIR GATE TO PORTALS OF OUR PAVILION. WE MAKE THIS POINT SOLELY TO ALLAY ANY STORIES WHICH MIGHT BE ENGENDERED BY THE DAMASCUS RUMOR MILL THAT CROWDS WERE IN SOME WAY STAGED OR PROGRAMMED TO FORCE U.S. PAVILION CLOSURE. WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO REASON TO BELIEVE THIS THE CASE.

5. OVERALL EFFECT OF PAVILION EXTERIOR IS EXCELLENT WITH FLOOD LIGHTS MAGNIFYING EFFECT OF WHITE BUILDING WITH BLUE VERTICAL STRIPES ON ONE SIDE AND RED STRIPED CANVAS ON SKYLAB. THERE IS LARGE "AMERICA" RED AT TOP OF PAVILION

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AND THREE LARGE BLUE "U.S.A." LETTERS IN HORIZONTAL POSITION. NOW THAT WE ARE UNDER WAY, WE LOOK FORWARD TO HOSTING STEADY STREAM OF FAIR GOERS BEGINNING WITH ANOTHER BIG NIGHT TONIGHT. SCOTES

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